

The Overlooked Undercount: Young Children Missed in the U.S. Decennial Census

Presentation Slides for the Committee on National Statistics Panel on the 2020 Census

November 16, 2021

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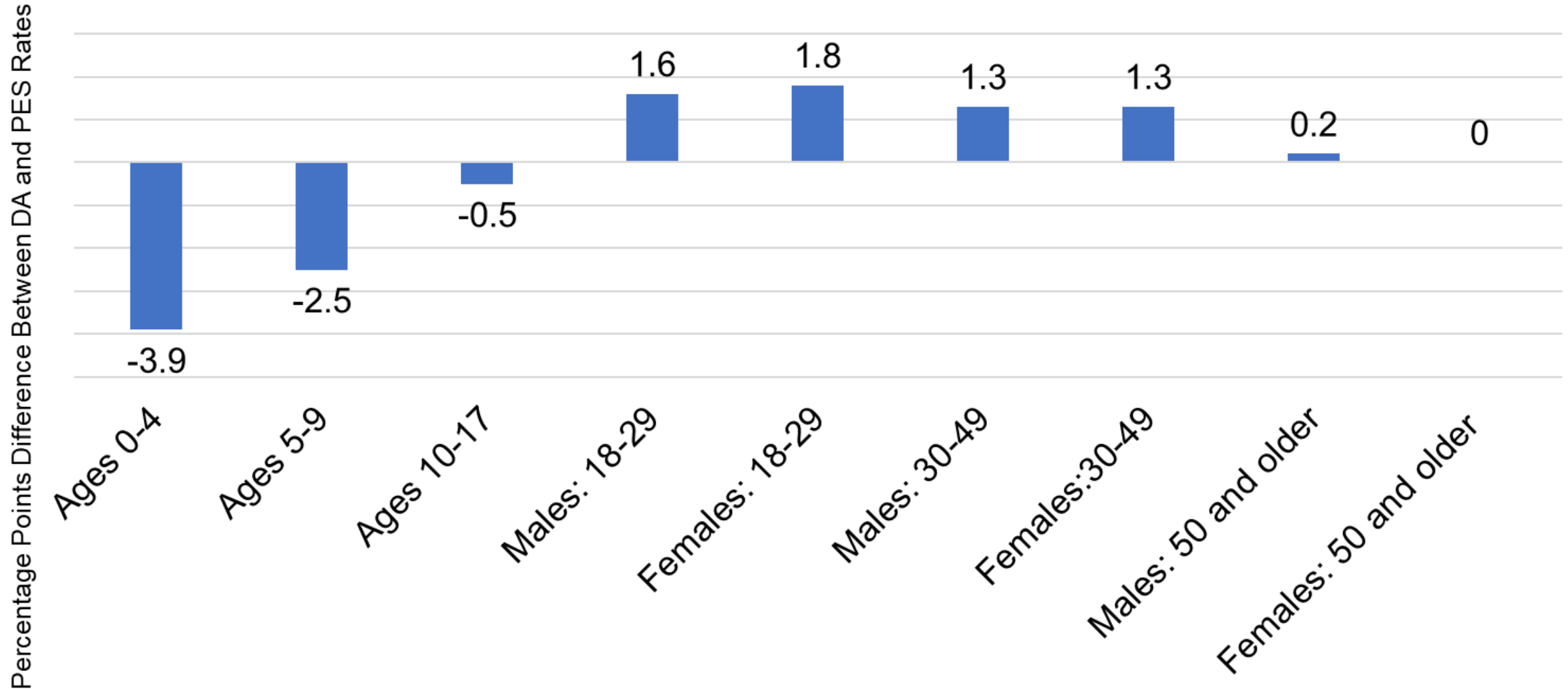
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Pervasive undercount of young children

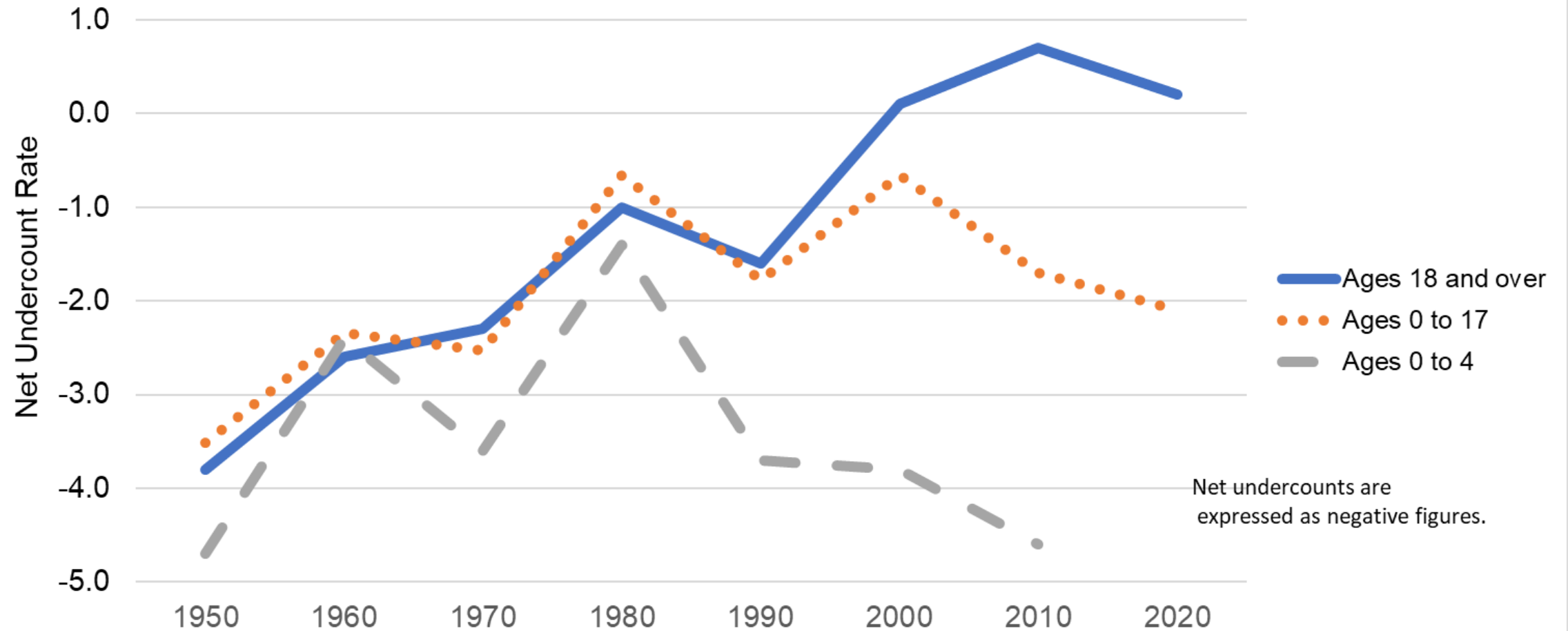
- 1940 to 2020 U.S. Census – Undercount of young children persisted;
 - under many different data collection methods,
 - in many differential socio-economic landscapes,
 - for many different demographic groups
- Young children under-reported in
 - American Community Survey
 - Current Population Survey
 - Survey of Income and Program Participation
- Young children are missed at a high rate in many other countries

DA and PES Net Undercount Estimates in 2010 Census Are Similar Except for Young Children



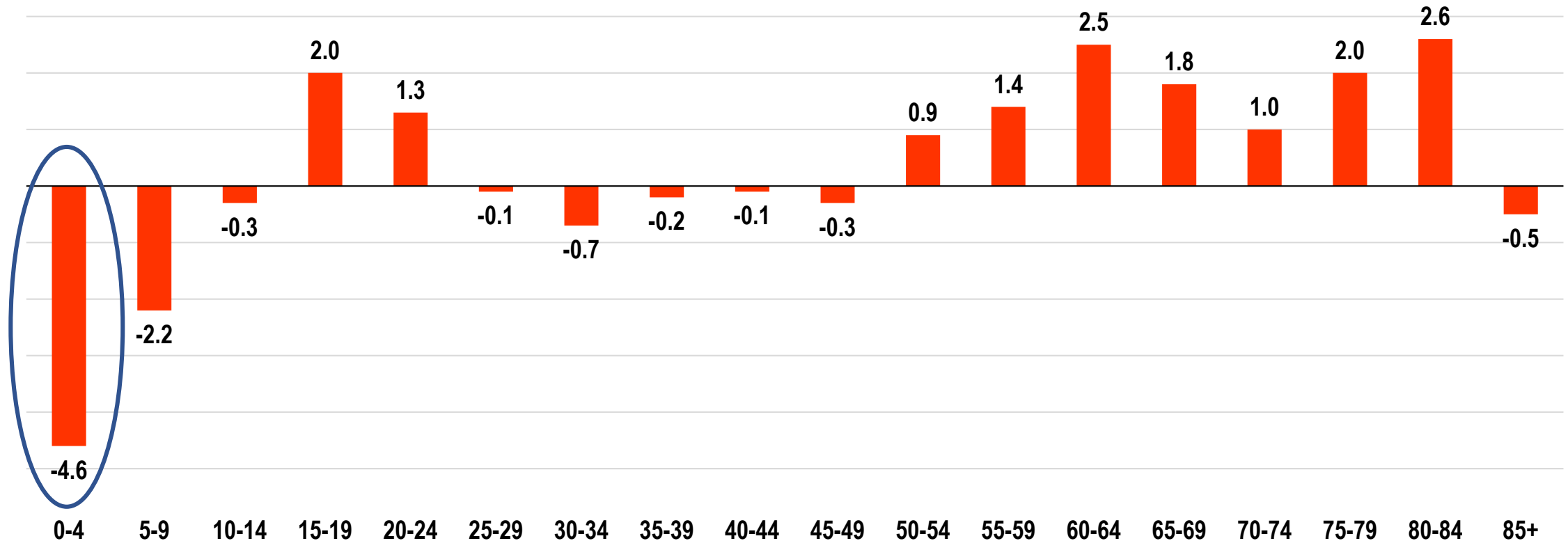
Source: O'Hare et al. 2016

After 1980, the census coverage of adults continued to improve while the net undercount of children and young children deteriorated.



Young Children Had a Higher Net Undercount (By Far) Than Any Other Age Group in the 2010 Census

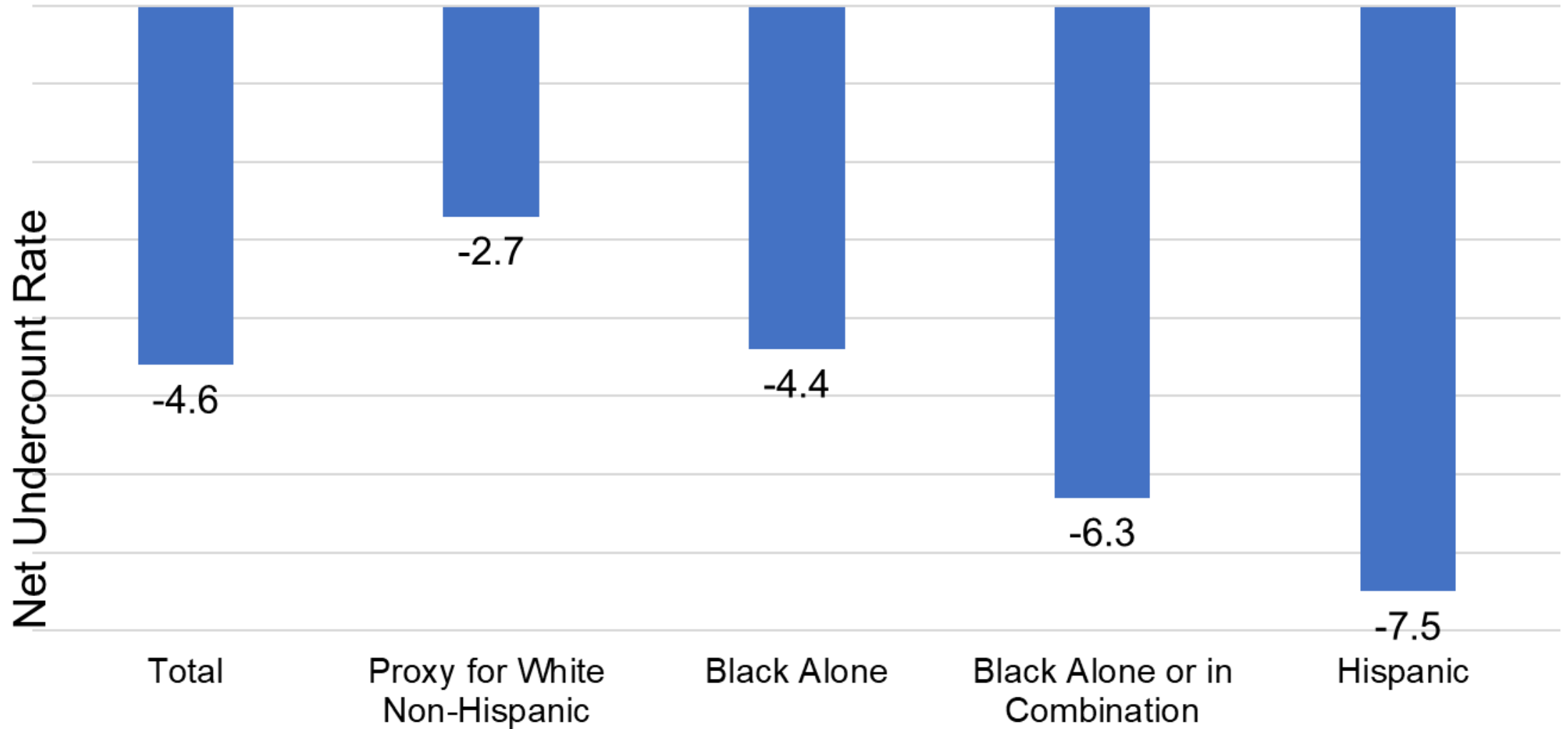
Net Undercount Rates (in Percentages) in 2010 Census, by Age Group



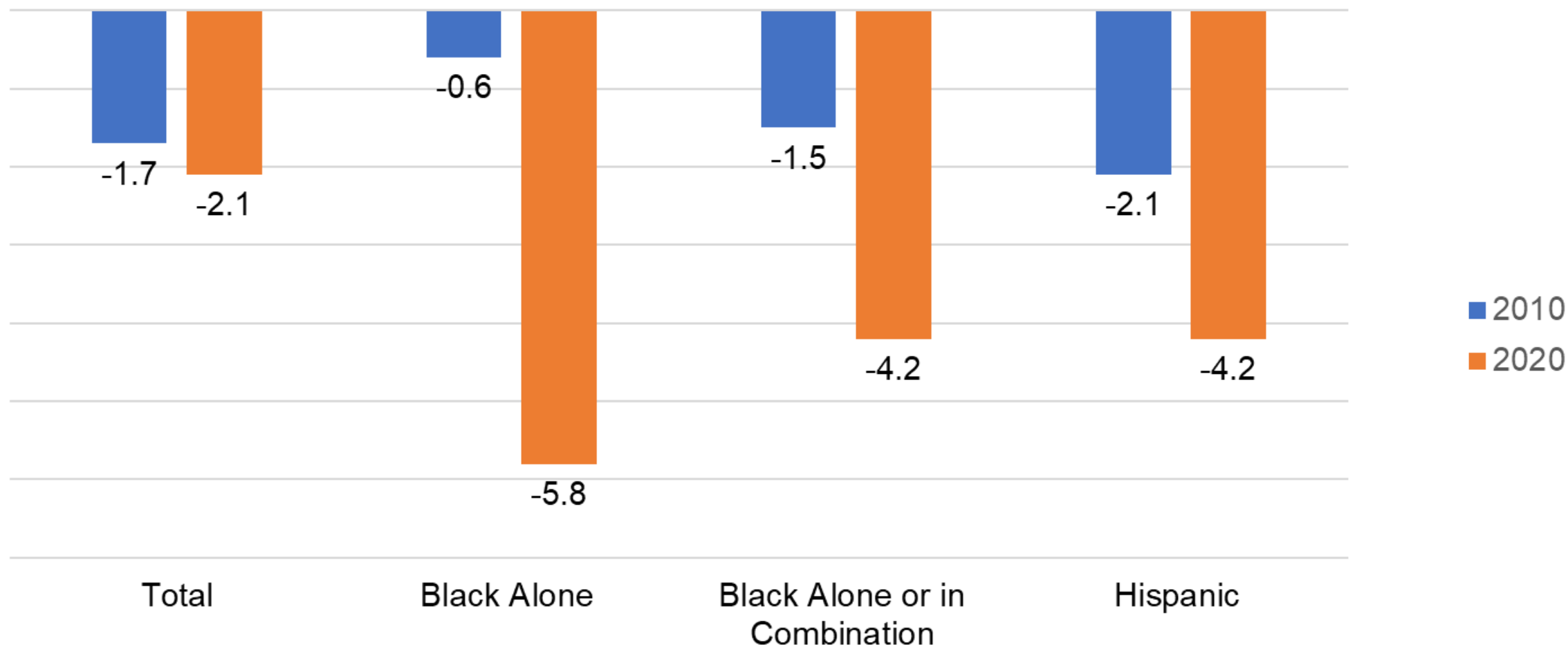
Undercount = 2010 Census Count minus 2012 Demographic Analysis (DA) Estimate

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, May 2012 Demographic Analysis (DA) release.

Black and Hispanic young children had higher net undercount rates than other young children in the 2010 Census



Large Increase in Net Undercount Rates for Black Children and Hispanic Children (Ages 0 to 17) Between in 2010 and 2020



Based on Middle Series
DA estimates for each year

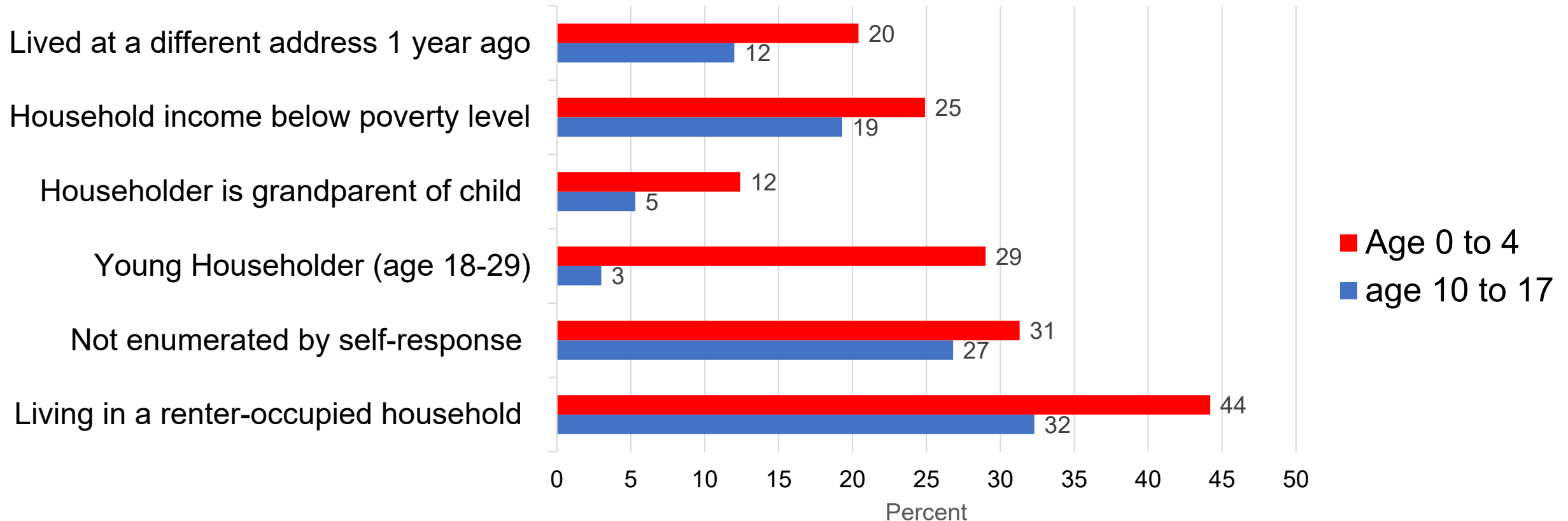
Source: O'Hare 2021

Why are young children
missed in the Census?

2 broad reasons why young children are missed at a high rate

1. Demographic characteristics of households with young children make them more vulnerable to being missed (See O'Hare et al. 2019).
2. Misunderstanding and confusion by parents (respondents) mean young children may be left of questionnaires.

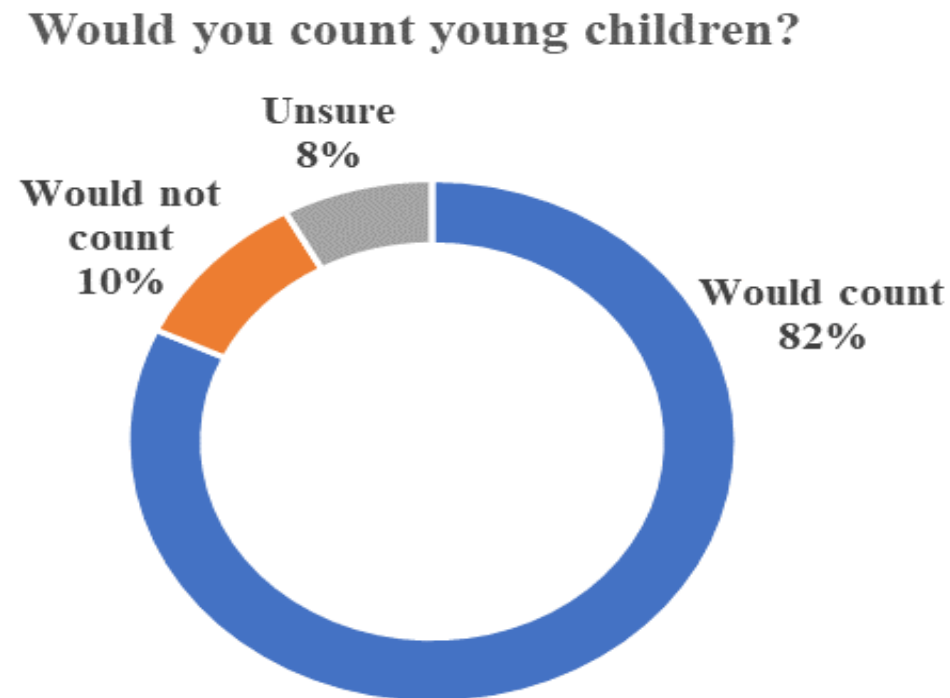
Young children are more concentrated in Hard-to-Count families and households



Source: U.S. Census Bureau:
2020 Census Memorandum Series

Count All Kids Campaign survey of respondents with a young child in the household found many respondents do not realize young children are supposed to be included in the census

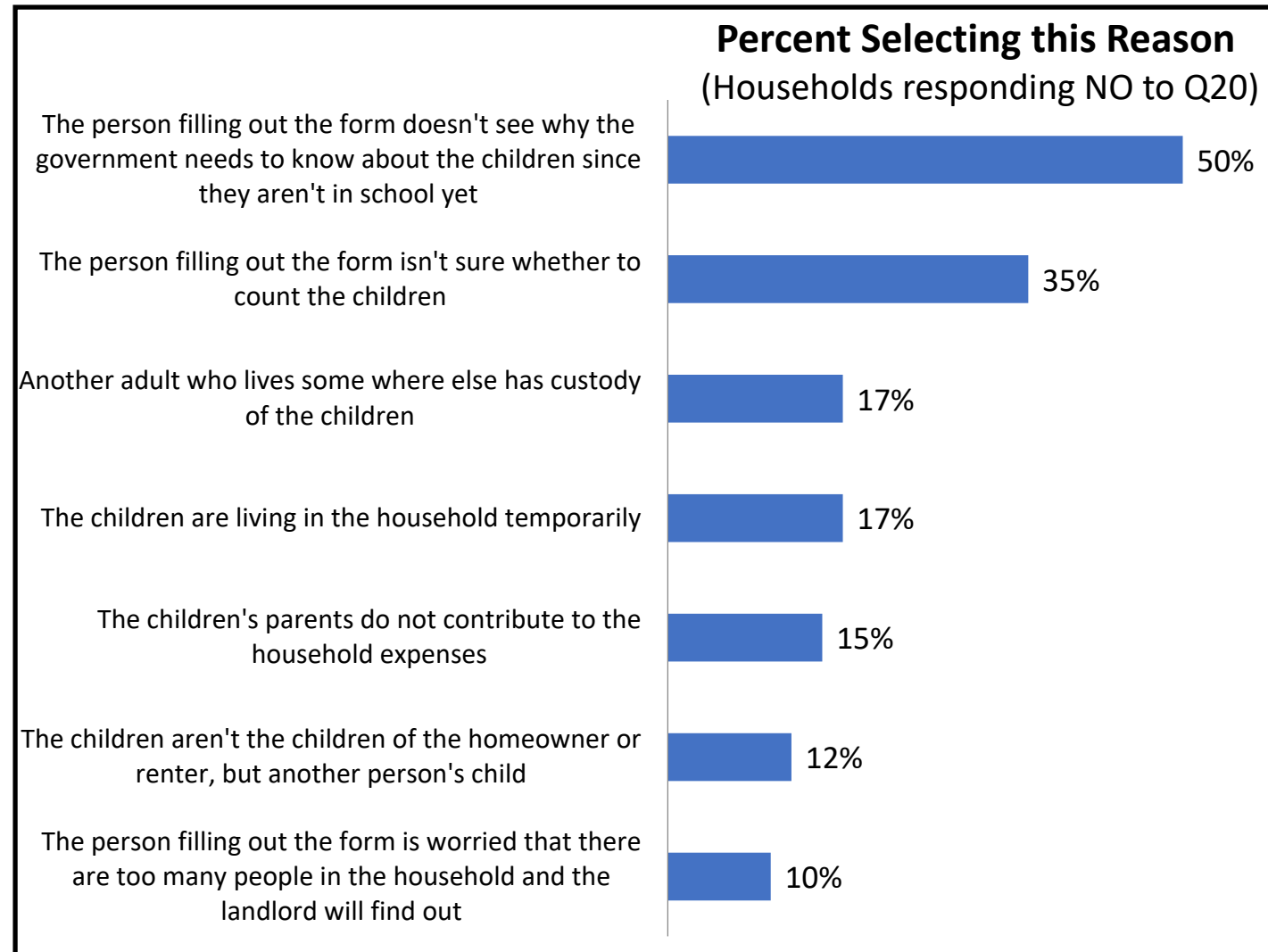
- *The census asks basic questions, such as, “how many people are in your home?” A number of people leave children ages 5 and under off the census. If you were answering that question on the census today, would you count children ages 5 and under who live in your home, would you not count children age 5 and under, or are you not sure?*



Source: Griffin and O'Hare 2020

Why might respondents not include young children on their census forms?

Q21. Why do you think people might not include children ages 5 and under on the census form? (Select all that apply)



Looking Forward - Short Term

- Census Bureau should link with child advocates early in the 2030 census cycle to work on this issue.
- Quickly update the 12 studies from 2016-19 Census Bureau Task Force reports & Fernandez report.
- Use ACS Content tests and census tests to hone rostering question to make sure young children are included.
- Conduct focus groups and more detailed survey(s) of reasons why people don't include young children in Census and Census Bureau surveys.
- Fully engage/fund Census Bureau's new multi-directorate task force on the undercount of young children and link with outside experts and stakeholders on this issue.
- Evaluate the new efforts in the 2020 Census to get more accurate data on young children.
- International section at Census Bureau could provide systematic estimates of undercount of young children in other countries to improve collective knowledge on this issue.

Looking Forward - Longer term

- Link with diaper manufacturers and formula/baby food manufacturers early in census cycle to have them put census message on products.
- Address the correlation bias issue of young children in the PES by:
 - Raising it with the Census Bureau advisory committees (NAC & CSAC)
 - Raising it with the CNSTAT census panel
 - Assemble a Subject Matter Expert panel like Census Bureau did for DA prior to 2020 Census
- Continue Young Child Undercount Working Group in Census Bureau's National Advisory Committee.
- Hold a Child Summit in each Census regional office prior to 2030 Census.
- Use pre-2030 CBAMS study to get more information on undercount of young children:
 - Ask more questions
 - Analyze data with focus on young children

Summary

- We have a lot of good evidence about the high net undercount of young children in the Census.
- We have some evidence about why young children are undercounted at such a high rate in the Census.
- We have very little evidence about how to fix this problem.

THANKS

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